

THE
OCCASIONAL PREACHER.

NUMBER VIII.

CONSIDERATIONS
ON
GOD'S SHORTNING
THE
DAYS OF YOUTH.

A SERMON preached at a *Tuesday Lecture*.

Ecclef. vii. 2. *It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: For that is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to his heart.*

Ibid. Chap. xi. 9. *Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth: ——— But remember, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.*

L O N D O N:

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A Sermon preached on the 27th day of February 1782.

Jer. vii. 2. It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to his heart.
1st. Chap. xi. 9. Repent, O young man, in thy youth, and let the heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth: but woe it will be, that for all this things God will bring thee into judgment.

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T H E

Occasional Preacher.

Number VIII.

*Considerations on GOD's shortning the
Lives of Men.*

PSALM LXXXIX. 45.

“The Days of his Youth hast
“Thou shortned.”

IT is observed that the distempers which have proved mortal of late, have taken away many in the *midst* of life, and in the days of *youth*. Some young persons within the compass of our acquaintance have died of violent *Fevers*, by which their heads were seized in such a manner, as to take away, or at least to disorder all the powers of thought. In such cases, there was no opportunity or capacity for turning the mind regularly to any thing of a religious nature. As their state was with respect to GOD, at the time when they fell sick, such was their departure out of this world. They that were prepared for a better state of existence, doubtless were removed hence in mercy to themselves, though probably for the

correction and punishment of others. But it is terrible to think of the state of them, who, in an unprepared state, were hurried unexpectedly out of this world. In both views, it is the duty of the *Living* to lay these deaths to heart, in order to a religious improvement of them, by acquainting ourselves with God, and enquiring after his designs in such awful providences. Thus we are directed in the *text* I have chosen for the subject of the ensuing discourse, to acknowledge and revere *Him* who is said to shorten the lives of men. "The days of his youth hast Thou shortned."

It is very uncertain to whom these words relate as they were first penn'd by the *Psalmist*: Because none can certainly determine who was the author of this *Psal*m, or at what time it was composed. Some read the title of it, *Maschil of Ethan the Ezrabite*, which they interpret thus: An excellent instructive Psalm, composed by *Ethan*, who liv'd in *Solomon's* time, and afterwards in *Rehoboam's*, when ten tribes revolted from the house of *David*. With an eye to this revolt, the latter end of the Psalm is interpreted as a lamentation, that the kingdom of *David* should thus suddenly fail, like a young man cut off in the flower of his age. That a family, which in two successive reigns rose to such renown, and look'd so great, should in the third generation become so little and contemptible as it was in the reign of *Rehoboam*. What are all the glories of this world, but short,

short, uncertain and perishing vapours, that blaze for a little time, and then vanish away!

Others read the title, *Maschil* for, or according to *Ethan the Ezrabite* or *Zarbite*: that is, a *Psalm* set to some former tune of a song, that was composed by *Ethan* the son of *Zerah*, the first word of which was *Maschil*. And then the lamentation at the end of the *Psalm* is understood as having respect to the *Babylonish captivity*. Thus applied, the words of the text are literally true both of *Jeboiachin*, and *Zedekiah*; who in the days of their youth were cut off, and made miserable captives by their cruel enemies,

But let these words, in their primary view, belong to whom they will; yet in their plain sense and import, they declare thus much to us; — “That God is to be owned in the shortning or lengthening the days and times of the children of men.” The days of our prosperity, the days of our life, yea the days of our youth, he can shorten as he pleaseth. Where death overtakes any in the beginning of their Years, and at the first of their setting out in the world, this text may be applied in a more special manner. And so it gives occasion to consider the following enquiries.

I. How it may be said of God that *He shortens* the days of those, who are cut off in their youth.

II. What Reasons may be assigned, why the great Sovereign of life and death should thus shorten humane life. And,

III. What religious use and improvement we ought to make of this.

I. Let us consider how God is said to *shorten* the days of them who die in their Youth. But before this is answered directly, there are two cautions requisite to be premised.

(1.) We must not conceive of this as if it implied any *sudden* or *hasty* determination of things in God.

Nothing can happen in the course of providence, but what God knew and foresaw, from the very beginning, would come to pass. There are no hasty passions, or changing schemes of things and variable dispositions in the all-perfect mind as there are in ours. No man's days are shortened by God otherwise than the settled laws of nature, and the laws of the divine government do fix and determine the matter. But, in our language, a man's days are said to be shortened, when, contrary to expectation and the common course of nature, he is taken away much sooner than others about him are: When according to our estimation he has many years to live, and yet it is God's appointment that he *should die*. This, however it be occasioned and brought about, is not to be conceived of as
owing

owing to any changeableness in God, or any sudden and unforeseen turn of things as to him. For with the Father of lights there is no *variableness*, nor so much as the *shadow of turning*.*

(2.) We must be very careful not to impute any of those sins and errors by which men shorten their days, unto any *necessitating decree* of God. Such is the rectitude of God, that he cannot be the author of sin, nor can he tempt any man to sin; and therefore when any man shortens his days by intemperance, or self-murder, or quarrels, or being any way drawn aside of his own lust and enticed, till lust when it is finished bringeth forth death; in these cases, both the evil and the punishment of it, lie at the sinner's own door. For however the appointment of God be fixed, that death shall prevail in such instances, yet he is not chargeable with those sins which lead to it.

These two things being cautioned against, God may be said to shorten the days of youth in the following respects.

1. As by his laws and appointments, he has determined upon what occasions, and at what seasons, *death shall prevail*.

God foresees all events, or else he could not be omniscient. He knows the certain effects of all natural causes; and he perceives as thoroughly what will be the course and actions of

* Jam. i. 17.

all voluntary agents. Hereupon, as the great Governor of the world, he determines how far he will permit natural causes to take place, and how far he will leave free agents to act according to their own choice and inclinations; or in what cases he will over-rule both, to serve penal or gracious purposes of his own. So that whenever death prevails, God is to be owned as the great Sovereign or Director of it, either in a more natural or judicial way. The laws of mortality are all settled and fixed by God, as well as the terms of salvation and immortality.

2. God may therefore be said to shorten the days of youth, when he permits young persons to *fall into those courses* which bring death.

Thus it is with them, who, through a rash and thoughtless, or disobedient and perverse temper, are given up to their own devices, and to their unruly appetites and evil affections, to lead such lives, or travel into such countries and climates as ruin their constitutions, breed distempers, and introduce, sometimes a lingering, sometimes a violent and sudden death. Should God deal with men according to their own deservings, and with some according to their desires, how justly might he withdraw his restraining grace from them? yea, might he not even take away common prudence and discretion from the generality of young persons, when by their sensu-
fualities

qualities and impieties, their flights of divine institutions, and following the sinful manners of this world, they first depart from God. How many are virtually, if not in so many express words, saying unto God, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways?"

3. God may be said to shorten the days of youth, as he sometimes remarkably hides from men the *means of preserving* life, or *restoring* it when under decays, and seized by violent distempers.

There is no case, that I know of, in which God may not, for reasons known to himself, refuse to *interpose* when life is in danger. But sometimes there is manifestly *less* of a divine interposition, through the neglect of prayer, than at other times. Some people are left to be strangely unapprehensive of their danger, whilst proper and effectual remedies might be found out to prevent distempers, or to remove and heal them. They go on till their diseases are past cure, or till the wisdom of the wise becomes foolishness; and the physician either cannot fully discover, or not sufficiently reach their case; while God does not see fit in any extraordinary way to appear for them.

4. God doth sometimes shorten the days of youth by an *immediate and judicial stroke*, for the punishment of some known sins.

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"When

“ When thou with rebukes dost correct man
 “ for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to con-
 “ sume away like a moth.” And when men
 fall under such *secret strokes* and *rebukes* from
 God, the youngest, the strongest, the weal-
 thiest, the greatest fall before him, and die
 away. “ Surely every man is vanity*.” This
 is expressed a little before in terms the fullest,
 and most moving that can possibly be used ;
 “ Verily *every* man, at his *best* estate, is *altoge-*
 “ *ther* vanity.”

But we must be very cautious how we ap-
 ply this to particular persons, and cases. Some
 people are apt to pronounce upon others with
 great rashness, and say, *that they are taken a-*
way by the judicial hand of God, when yet
 these judging people are not able to produce
 any special and immediate causes, that are
 sufficient to justify their passing such a sen-
 tence. It is certain, that all our lives are for-
 feited to divine Justice, if God should be strict
 to mark against us all our iniquities. And death
 is the appointed punishment, and wages of sin.
 But to say, that this or the other person's hav-
 ing the days of *his youth* shortned, is an im-
 mediate judgment from God, and that he is
 mark'd out hereby as a greater sinner than
 others, is to speak very unadvisedly, unless
 where we are able to shew that the punishment
 doth actually point to the *sin*, or that there is
 some *strange* act of God in a particular death.

* Psal. xxxix. 5.

When

When either the rashness of the young, or the illnature of the old, say that a death is *judicial*, without assigning some proper cause of such an *execution*, it may be very justly retorted upon the censorious, that "unless they repent, they shall likewise perish *."

However, this does not hinder our being well assured, in some cases, that death is sent *judicially* to shorten mens days, and to punish them for their sins, when those sins are notorious and openly avowed. Secret things belong not to us, but to God. When the *Psalmist*, speaking of God's shortning the age of man says, "Thou hast set our secret sins in the light of thy countenance †;" we may conclude, that all have reason to fear before him, and this should be a continual warning to young persons to avoid *secret* sins. For God may justly punish *these* with death, though others cannot prove that there is an immediate order for shortning life on account of *secret* sins.

But this we do know, that they who lift up themselves in a way of rebellion, or in a course of undutifulness to parents and lawful governors, do often fall by some judicial stroke. For the fifth commandment, promising length of days to the obedient and dutiful, plainly implies that rebellion or undutifulness, is a sin for which the days of *many* are shortned. So also where men are guilty of *blood*, or of no-

* Luke xiii. 3.

† Psal. xc. 8.

torious *frauds* and deceits, the Scripture tells us expressly, “ that bloody and deceitful men “ shall not live out half their days *.” And where men obstinately indulge their lusts, giving up themselves to *intemperance and sensuality*, we read, that, in the midst of such corrupt and abominable practices, “ the wrath of “ God came upon the most strong and flourishing, and even the chosen men of *Israel* “ were slain †.”

When in these and such like cases men are to a certain degree found guilty, and their days are shortned by the arrests of death, the just judgment of the Almighty is more especially to be revered, and the stroke plainly appears to be from him. Not that sentence against these evil works, is speedily, and in all instances executed; for then there would not be a disobedient, rebellious, intemperate, deceitful, or bloody-minded man left in the earth: But at some times, and in some cases, God does take vengeance on the iniquities of men by shortning their days, to the end that such courses may stand *sufficiently* condemned, though *all offenders* are not immediately and in like manner punished.

Nevertheless, it must also be observed here, that some who are very *hopeful*, and *pious*, and well disposed, are taken away in the midst of their days, or in the bloom of them, as well as others that are sinful and wicked. So that

* Psal. lv. 23.

† Psal. lxxviii. 29. — 31.

we cannot conclude from the time and manner of any one's death, that it is *penal* and *judicial*, without considering other circumstances, and weighing the reasons of things.

II. I shall now proceed, therefore, to enquire what reasons there are *apparent to us*, why the great Sovereign of life and death should see fit to shorten the lives of men. And this I shall consider both with reference to those that are *cut off in their sins*, and with respect to such as are in a more *hopeful* and good state, when they are taken out of this world.

I. I shall briefly offer some *reasons* why those who are *in their sins*, have the days of their youth shortned. You may take these reasons in the order following.

(1.) GOD sometimes doth thus appoint death to prevent *further* and *greater evils*, to which such young persons are advancing.

GOD sees and knows the way that they take, and what they are likely to be led to; and therefore in mercy, to prevent their becoming enormously and desperately wicked, he shortens their days. By this means, that more dreadful *degree* of misery and torment, in the other world, is prevented; which, had they lived to commit greater iniquities, they must have laid in a greater stock and foundation for.

The

The more their black account is swell'd, the more will the future reckoning be enflamed. Thus, shortning the days of sin may lessen the degrees of punishment: And, for that reason, it is certainly better for God to pronounce over a young offender, "Thou shalt now die for thy sins," than to have him say, "He that is unjust let him be unjust still, and he that is filthy let him be filthy still," till double or treble vengeance shall overtake him.

(2.) By the sinner's being called to die when he is but young in sin, he may be *awakened* to the *fear* of God. He may have those repentings kindled within him, which shall prepare the way for mercy to glorify itself.

Before conscience is hardened, and the ripened power of sin is fixed, and the principles of infidelity come to take place, perhaps conscience may be alarmed by the sight of *death*. The near views of eternity and judgment may possibly produce repentance unto life. In this case, though the sentence of death should not be reversed as to the body, yet the second death, which is the final destruction of the soul and body in hell, and which is eternal, may be prevented. And perhaps, the only way to prevent that, may be God's sending present death in such an awakening manner, that hereby those holy, heavenly dispositions, and that faith in a Redeemer may be promoted, which are necessary to save the soul.

(3.) When

(3.) When God permits any to shorten the days of their youth by sin, this may be *so ordered* as to prevent others using themselves so *adventurously*.

The young, the bold and thoughtless, learn to be apprehensive of danger, and to grow more cautious and wise, when they see others of *their age*, and manner of life, cut off before their eyes. No man (one would think) that has by intemperance, or ill conduct, made adventures upon his health and constitution, but must be greatly affected when he considers the goodness of God in sparing him, whilst he sees others by the same courses bring death upon themselves. One serious thought on the goodness of God, in this respect, may lead to more, and so may render such a person's after-life not only more prudent and regular, in hope of it's being prolong'd, but he may become devotional and religious. They that are young converts have, many times, much warmer and more settled spiritual affections than others have.

(4.) When any man's days of youth are shortened in a course of sin, this leadeth some who were *religiously disposed* before, to become more *diligent* in the work of their salvation.

A desirable acquaintance cut off in an irreligious turn of mind, will make a new convert more careful to *improve his continued day of grace*. He will then say, "Such a One,
" my

“ my companion, my acquaintance is dead;
 “ and the most awful thought which attends
 “ his death is, that by the *day of life* being
 “ shortned, his *day of grace* was shortned
 “ too. Could my good wishes now reach
 “ his soul, he should be happy; or could
 “ they call him to life again, he should have
 “ further time to prepare for an eternal world.
 “ Well, can I have these thoughts and wishes
 “ about him that is gone, and shall I not be
 “ proportionably careful about my own soul!
 “ My day of grace yet continues, O let me
 “ not misimprove it, or trifle it away! since I
 “ see life is so frail and uncertain, and no
 “ sooner is the day of life concluded, but the
 “ day of grace will be at an end too, Lord
 “ teach me so to number my days, that I may
 “ apply my heart to true wisdom!”

Thus may very great and good ends be answered, by God's shortning the days of some that die in their sins. They may be taken away to prevent their becoming worse, and so aggravating their future condemnation. Or perhaps the early views of death may awaken their minds to the *fear* of God, and bring them to *repentance*. Or however one young person's dying in sin, may prevent others using themselves so adventurously. And then also, where there are any dispositions to religion before, an unexpected death hath a tendency to make such more careful to improve their *day of grace*.

But

But beside these things which are apparent in general, there may be other weighty and sufficient reasons why the most wise and righteous God should shorten the days of particular persons. Things that are now hidden shall be made manifest at the great *disclosing day*, when the Judge of all the earth shall justify his proceedings, before the vast assembly of angels and men.

2. I shall next mention some reasons why those, that are *in a hopeful and good state*, may sometimes have their *days shortened*.

(1.) Some of these may, probably, have reached the *utmost term* of life for which their tabernacles were built, though they are, according to our language, cut off in their youth.

The frame and constitution of some bodies is so very frail and brittle, that they must be preserved with great care and watchfulness, if they attain to half the number of years, which others arrive at. Now it may so happen, and I believe often does, that persons of this make are early and powerfully inclined to the thoughts of religion. They are excited to a great and effectual care about their future state, by the continual apprehensions that they have of their nearness to death and judgment. And hence it is, that in a few years they make great preparations for another

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world,

world, and early finish their work here. In thus doing they may continue to that *full length* of time for which their bodies were formed at first, while yet it seems to others that their days are *shortned*. Or,

(2.) Some good persons may die in their youth, because it is the *most advantageous season* for their leaving this world.

If good men are taken away while, according to the course and strength of nature, one might expect their continuance, it is probably so ordered by God, because he would have them quit this world, and enter into the other, either with some peculiar advantage to themselves, or to his cause and interest, or both. By being thus early called away, they are delivered from some dangerous temptations, and from falling into some *worse condition* than that in which death is appointed to seal their characters. Their souls might be in the *best frame* to quit this life, and religion might be best served by their *dying testimony to it*; and therefore by a death sooner than others expected, they are called to *glorify* God. Thus would I choose to die, just as God sees the lengthning or shortning of my days, may best serve to promote a religious, seasonable, and advantageous *withdrawment* from life and all things here.

(3.) Some good persons die in their youth, that we may have *good and encouraging examples* of

of such as go both early and happily out of this world.

These examples are as needful and instructive, as examples that are *penal* and terrible. When the days of the *wicked* are shortned, and they are cut off in their sins, it is that others should be brought to fear and tremble at their untimely end, and not dare to live in their wickedness. When the youthful days of good men are shortned, it is that others may learn from thence, even in the days of youth, to despise so *vain* a world as this, and to look with *ardent affections* and lively hopes to the things that are above.

What a noble testimony is it to the truth and power of religion, when a young man shall appear willing to resign all his prospects, as to this world, and all the pleasures and enjoyments of sense, for the sake of heaven, and things unseen! And how encouraging is the example to hear such an one, (as I have formerly been a witness to this very language) “choosing death with an interest in Christ, before life with all its usual joys, and with the greatest gains and treasures, in a state of absence from Christ, and in danger of being separated from him.”

In such cases as these the days of youth are shortned, that there may be some *good examples* of persons dying young, to credit religion, and to win over those that are of *tender, ingenuous*

spirits unto God; whilst others that die in their wickedness, are made examples of *terror*, to shock more *rude* and stupid minds.

(4.) Those that are good sometimes have the days of their youth shortned, for the *correction* or *trial* of their kindred and families.

Sometimes a desirable young creature is taken away, that the Faults of others their relations or friends, may be remedially punished by the loss of such. Sometimes that their Graces may be tried in the manner of their behaviour, and the conduct of their passions, on such occasions. The time would fail me to say how many idolatrous affections, or sinful cares, and excessive passions are corrected, by these dispensations of providence.

These, and some other considerations, which perhaps occur to your own minds, will serve to justify the wise and good God, in sometimes shortning the lives of them that are religious and hopeful, as well as the vicious and wicked. But I confess, that the shortning of the days of some pious and useful persons in the world, is a Matter too hard for our reason fully to enter into, or to give a satisfactory account of it. There are many cases, of this kind, in which we must refer ourselves and others to the laws of the invisible world, and to the light of a future judgment.

III. Let us now consider what *use* and *improvement* we ought to make of such a subject as this.

I. From what has been said, we may infer, that neither *good* nor *bad men* can have any *assurance*, that the days of their youth shall not be shortned.

One would think this should rouse the habitual sinner, as also the busy agent and drudge for this life, each out of his security; and awake him to righteousness, and to forsake every evil way, lest his dead warrant should come in an hour when he thinks not, and he should be cut off in his sins. One would also expect, that the Good should be more watchful, and prayerful, and ready to every good work, because they may have but a very short time to work in. As to both, one would wonder that it should ever be, as the Parable represents it concerning the *wise and foolish Virgins*, that they should be slumbering and sleeping, as if the coming of their Lord was a great way off, when their days are thus liable to be shortned, and they called hence before they are aware.

2. How wise a method would it be, for all of us to *shorten our hopes and prospects as to this world*.

Since our *days* are thus liable to be shortned,

ned, our *cares* for this life should be so too. We are apt to cut out schemes for ourselves in futurity, without duly considering, how short and frail human life is. Hence it comes to pass that many projects for science and in the way of learning, for action and business, for enjoyment and ease and pleasure, lie broken, and are never filled up; and men die under the uneasiness of the disappointment. Whereas, if we could learn to shorten our prospects and schemes of things, as the term of our days may be shortened, and could inure ourselves to daily and familiar converse with death, we should then be more prudent in our undertaking things, more diligent in our endeavouring quickly to accomplish them, and we shall be more safe and easy when we are called off from all by death.

How ill do men judge of things, when they spend their days in preparing to *live*, instead of preparing to *die*! This is truly the case, when vast projects are laid, and long schemes of things are to be filled up, before men propose to sit down and enjoy, or with any wise and pious views to do good with what they have. They spend a whole life in preparing *to live*: And then when death comes, if they are truly sensible of the important consequences of it, they want to live their time over again, that they may *prepare to die*. Let us now be persuaded to think how many ways our life is liable to be shortened, that

that we may shorten our prospects and promises of this and t'other thing to ourselves, in futurity; and may not foolishly spend all those days in preparing to live on earth, which God gives us to spend in preparing for a more blissful and durable life in heaven. A *short* life well spent, will fit us for glory honour and immortality; but the *longest* life spent in sin, and in continual worldly projects and aims, will leave men disappointed and miserable at last.

3. How much should it excite the wonder and thoughtfulness of those who are in a *state of sin*, to consider that God has not shortned their days, and cut them off before this time?

Have not you used yourselves as adventurously as some others have done, whose days are now shortned, and their places here shall know them no more? Have you not as highly provoked God, by his rebukes to correct you for your iniquity? Yea, have you not seen your lives and your souls in danger, and God has mercifully interposed, and rescued your bodies from the grave, and your souls from the pit of everlasting destruction? And will not this Goodness of God lead you to repentance? Think, I beseech you, how dreadful your condition will be at last, if you should be spared only to *treasure up wrath against the day of wrath,*

wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God. Think again, how soon some distemper may seize you, of which you have now no apprehension. The seeds of many diseases which prove mortal to us, are brought into the world with us; and lie in ambush (as it were) in one part or other of our bodies, till the signal is given from the great Lord of life and death, to move on to our execution. And what man can tell how soon the signal may be given, and the sentence of death passed upon him?

Besides, how many casualties, and accidental diseases are we subject to? It is a wonderful mercy that it should not be said this day of one or other of *you*, the days of *his* youth, or of *her* youth, hast thou shortened, when it is thus said of many of your acquaintance! But if the thoughts of this mercy will not move you as it ought to do, surely the thought of its being a mercy so *uncertain*, and what shortly will have an end, should have a powerful effect upon you.

4. Let this engage even the *youngest* amongst us to *repent immediately of every sin, and to remember your Creator in the days of your youth.*

O be speedy, in forsaking those sins for which God has threatened to shorten life, *disobedience, intemperance, &c.* Flee youthful lusts, but follow righteousness, faith, and charity.

Hear



Hear the voice of him that thus speaks to you, and from this very moment let this counsel be acceptable unto you.

When our Saviour called upon the *young man* in the gospel to follow him, he would not surely have replied, "Let me first go and bury my Father," had he considered, that his days of youth might be shortned, and he cut off *before* his father. And yet how common is it, for the children of a family to be taken away, whilst the Parents remain? The Branches are lopt off, whilst the root and stock abide. Those that are expecting and contriving about the death of others, are themselves very commonly *first* called off the stage. Thus frequently are the days of youth shortned, when the days of the aged, and the far advanced in life are prolonged. Is it not then as much the concern of the young, as of the aged, to fear God, and give up themselves to him; and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this world? Why should not this day be the time of your hearty surrender to God? And why should not your next day be the beginning of a new and better life? To make long and tedious work in resolving to live to God, is very unwise, when your days may be shortned, and you cut off in your hesitations and delays.

If any now have it in the purpose of their hearts, that their best days (the days of their

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youth)

youth) shall be consecrated to the service of their Maker, and the glory of their Redeemer, and to the purposes of religion, let such think well on that *text* in the *Ecclesiastes* *,
 “ When thou vowest a vow unto GOD, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure
 “ in fools.” To vow, and design, and promise to change our life, and to amend this and the other thing which we are convinced ought to be amended, and yet to continue in, or return to the same actions and courses, notwithstanding all our vows and purposes, is a mark of a vain, trifling and foolish mind. Be wise, therefore, and firm and steady, in renouncing every thing that is evil, and cleaving to every thing that is good; and this, without deferring to another time. It is a sign of folly, according to reason as well as Scripture, to put off and delay any thing which is *necessary* and *important*, when we are required immediately to set about it. Read that text over again, and fix it on your hearts,— *When thou vowest a vow unto GOD, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools.*

Have a care of promising yourselves *many* days, and years to come. This will betray you to continued neglects of GOD, and will expose you to the power of many temptations. Rather spend some part of this evening, in thinking that the days of *your* youth may be shortned, as well as *others*; and bewail your

* Chap. v. 4.

sins and follies, and list yourselves under the banner of the great Captain of your salvation, that you may become followers of Christ. Place your happiness in denying the flesh, and crucifying the sinful appetites, and desires, and humours of it, rather than in making provision for it to fulfil the lusts thereof. *

To conclude; let us all make it our daily care, to live such lives, as we find men wish they had lived when they come to die. And then, finally, from meditating on God's shortning our days here on earth, let us proceed to think on that *eternity* which lies beyond the grave. Our age here is as nothing, compared with our future duration. How preposterous then is it, to let the cares and amusements of this short life, take place of those concerns and expectations that are endless? O Eternity! our hope! and yet our

* If that young man, whose death first occasioned this discourse, was now alive, and if he retained the sense of things, which he professed to have in his last sickness, he would loudly have called upon every companion and acquaintance, thus to break off their sins by repentance, and to yield themselves to God in newness of life. Could I describe to you the earnest eyes, and pale countenance, and trembling limbs with which he asked, *Is there mercy? is there hope of mercy for me?* this would plead for your improving your present season of grace, better than any other arguments that I can use. This dying testimony he left to the *truth* and *power* of religion, "That he would rather chuse an interest in the mercy of God through CHRIST with death, than be restored to life and health again to enjoy all worldly advantages, without this."

Amaze-

Amazement and our dread ! How should we transfer our thoughts, anxieties and wishes more to thee ! — O Eternity ! thou awful, joyful thought !

Lord help us to use a short life so, as that we may secure a blissful Eternity.

God grant that this may be the Happiness of us all, through Jesus Christ our Lord ; to whom be glory and dominion world without end. *Amen.*

F I N I S.

NUMBER IX. is ready for the Press,

Of the SIN and DANGER of SUSPENSE about Religion, and the WORSHIP of GOD, 1 Kings xviii. 21. — “ How long halt ye between two “ Opinions ? ” —



Errors, p. 15. line 8. *from the bottom*, f. any man's, r. a man's ; and line 7. *from ditto*, f. leadeth, r. may lead.

